

Sermon for August 18, 2013 – VBS Closing Service.

Matthew 4:17-22

Theme: Let's go fishing with Jesus!

- 1) *Leave your worldly worries and cares.*
- 2) *Learn from the master.*
- 3) *Confidently use the equipment He gives us.*

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." ¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Imagine being at work - stressed out with all the stuff you have to do and can't get done. You think your boss is going to fire you, because of your lack of effort. Now imagine your boss walking towards you with a fishing rod in his hand – whistling as he walks. He comes up to you and says: "Let's go fishing. Don't worry about that stuff – I'll take care of it. Come with me and relax." Wow, wouldn't that be great!

Our spiritual reality is actually a little like what we just imagined. We are under a lot of stress and worry. What causes it? Our sins against the Ten Commandments that God commanded us to keep perfectly. We can't do it. We can't love Him and others as perfectly as our LORD demands. Because of this, we deserve His punishment.

But Jesus comes to us in the Gospel. He tells us not to worry – that He has taken care of everything. He tells us to follow him, because He has a little "fishing" trip planned for us.

Let's go fishing with Jesus. *1) Leave your worldly cares and worries behind. 2) Learn how to fish from the Master himself, and 3) confidently use the fishing equipment he has given us.*

Part One: Leave your worldly worries and cares.

Our sermon text finds Andrew, Peter, James and John fishing. Why? Because, even though they were already Jesus' disciples, they still had a business to run in order to provide for their families. They were students – not teachers, and like students today, they had to work in order to put food on the table.

When these disciples finished up a day of fishing, Jesus met them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and said: "*Come, follow me. . . and I will make you fishers of men.*"

And how did these disciples react to Jesus' invitation to follow him; to leave their work behind in order to learn how to be "fishers of men?" Did they say they were too busy? No. They immediately left everything - their boats, their fishing gear, their family and friends - and followed Jesus.

We, like the disciples, have been laboring away - trying to catch "something." And what is the "something" are we trying to catch? The same thing all people are: purpose and peace in life – and hope for the life to come. We have tried hunting down money, pleasure, friends, fame etc. . . . We may have even caught some of these things, but we soon found out that they can not give us true rest.

But then Jesus came to us through the Gospel and called us to follow him. He promised to provide for us the purpose and peace we so desperately desired. He explained that our restlessness is a result of our sins against God. Our guilty conscience is meant to get us to acknowledge our sin, and get us searching for the Savior. And He, that Savior, has come. He has come to work out our salvation, to give us the forgiveness and peace our hearts we so desperately need. Follow him - that is, believe in him, and you will find rest for your souls.

Now how do people react to Jesus' call to follow him? Some say that they are too busy to follow him. Others say that they don't need to follow Jesus, that they can obtain purpose and peace on their own. Many decline Jesus' invitation, staying behind as Jesus continues walking along the shore, calling others to learn from him. Sadly, they remain in their sin and, if they continue there, they will die with having obtained true purpose, peace or eternal hope.

But what about you and me? How will we respond to Jesus' offer of forgiveness through faith in him? Well, if this morning is any indication, I can see the Holy Spirit is already at work in your hearts. Why do I say that? Because this morning you left your busy lives to come to church in order to confess your sins to God and receive the forgiveness Jesus won for you on the cross. The hymns we sing, and the Bible lessons we read all speak of it. We came to Church to hear Jesus. Continue listening and following Jesus and you will find rest for your souls.

Part Two: Learn from the Master.

The forgiveness Jesus offered moved Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave everything behind - trusting that their Savior would provide for all their needs. They followed Jesus in the joy of forgiveness, ready to become fishers of men.

Knowing the forgiveness we have in Jesus, don't you also want to be "fishers of men", so that your family, friends and acquaintances can have the same hope in Christ that you have? But how do we go about fishing for souls?

There are many people who claim to know how to fish for souls. They use a variety of bait to attract people to their churches: the bait of entertainment, the line of promising success in this life, and the rod of just telling people what they want to hear. But these are false fishermen. Yes, they may catch many people, but they also spiritually harm the people they catch. True fishers of men - true followers of Jesus - are not like this. They are not trying to hurt or kill the fish they catch. Rather, they are sort of like the DNR: trying to rescue fish from the polluted waters of this earth, and transfer them into the clear life-giving waters of heaven.

How do we fish to save and not destroy? We must use the same methods our Savior used to catch us. We warn people about sin - that is, we tell them the truth about the danger of hell they are in because of their sinfulness. Then we cast the net of the Gospel, the message of Jesus' living the perfect life we all failed to live, and the good news of his death and resurrection for us. He paid the price our sins had earned so that, through faith in him, we might have eternal life. This is the only method of fishing that saves the people we hope to catch. This is the way our Master taught us to fish.

Part Three: Use the net He gave us.

I want to talk a little bit more about the fishing equipment Jesus wants us to use. He did not give us a rod, reel and bait to attract people. It is not our skill or savvy that brings people to Christ. Jesus gave us the net of the Gospel. And as we spread the net of the Gospel into the waters of this world, many people try to flee from it. Fish don't like getting caught. But, as we troll with the Gospel in the waters of this world, it will find people, grab hold of them and not let them go. People might try to fight off this net, not knowing they are caught for their own good, but the net of the Gospel holds them, just as it held us Christians, when we were swimming in the sea of unbelief.

Another amazing thing about the net Jesus gives us to use, is that it catches all kinds of fish. Have you ever watched one of those documentaries about deep-sea fishing? It is fascinating seeing deep-sea fishermen hauling in the nets they dragged through the ocean and the great variety and multitude of fish that spills into their boats, all flapping and jumping around the deck of the ship. The net of the Gospel also catches a multitude and variety of people from every corner of the globe; young and old – so that heaven might be filled with people *from every nation, tribe, people and language* (Rev 7:9 NIVO) . Yes, there is no better equipment to use, than the net of the Gospel.

Having said that, there are times when it seems like we can't find a single fish; when people seem to evade and hide from the net of the Gospel. Should that discourage us from fishing? No, Jesus doesn't want us to give up. He wants us to continue casting the Gospel-net he gave us - at work, at school, on the street, at home; at all times - because at some point, when we may least expect it, the LORD may grant us a harvest of souls. He will grant this blessing in His time.

Dear friends, gathered here for worship. Let's go fishing with Jesus. Leave your worldly cares and worries behind and find rest in your Savior! Learn how to fish from the Master himself, casting the net He gives you and leaving it to the LORD as to how he will bless your trip. He promises to bless us, so keep on fishing. Amen.